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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 001648

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS AND DS/IP/SA
LONDON FOR POL/GURNEY, NSC FOR MILLARD

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPAL: MAOIST HIT TEAMS SHOOT TWO ARMY COLONELS IN KATHMANDU

REF: (A) KATHMANDU 1644 (B) IIR 6 867 0058 03

(KATHMANDU)

Classified By: Ambassador Michael E. Malinowski for reasons 1.5 (b,d).

SUMMARY

1. (S) Less than 24 hours after breaking the seven-month cease fire Maoist hit squads shot two Royal Nepal Army (RNA) colonels in separate incidents in Kathmandu on August 28. One died within hours of the attack; the other is in stable condition. The security forces expect the Maoists to pursue a campaign of targeted assassinations in the capital (Reftel). The two colonels, who were active in the RNA's counter-insurgency effort and who normally are not provided the security detail given to flag-rank officers, were politically significant--and easily accessible--targets. The colonel is the highest-ranking RNA officer to have been killed by the Maoists in the seven years of the insurgency. Government of Nepal Cabinet ministers are deliberating on what actions the GON will take in response to the assassinations. Reliable sources indicate that the GON will likely decide to re-declare the Maoists as a terrorist group, restore the anti-terrorist act, and issue Interpol blue-corner notices on Maoist leaders. End summary.

MURDER AND MAYHEM IN THE MORNING

2. (U) Less than 24 hours after breaking a seven-month cease fire with the Government of Nepal (GON), Maoist assassination squads shot two Royal Nepal Army (RNA) colonels at their homes in Kathmandu on the morning of August 28. In the first incident, a hit squad of four or five armed men shot Col. Kirin Bahadur Basnyat, assigned to the Eastern Division, several times when he came out of his house at approximately 0730 local time. One of the attackers reportedly was armed with a sub-machine gun. Basnyat died approximately two hours later at the hospital. At about 0835 local time, Col. Ramindra Chhetri was shot four times by a hit squad as he emerged from his Kathmandu home (approximately 5 km from the site of the Basnyat shooting). He is reportedly in stable condition at the military hospital.

MID-LEVEL UP-AND-COMERS

3. (SBU) Both Basnyat and Chhetri were promising mid-level officers, trained in the US, who had been active in the GON's counter-insurgency effort. Until recently, Basnyat was deputy commander of the 10th Brigade in charge of Nepal's Special Forces as well as chief of the counter-terrorist interrogation team in Kathmandu. He had just returned to Kathmandu on August 2 after attending a three-week IMET-sponsored Executive Course at the National Defense University. Basnyat had recently been given an important command in the Eastern Division. (Note: Eastern Division troops killed 17 Maoists, including some high-ranking local commanders, in an engagement in Ramechhap District on August 17. End note.) Chhetri, who graduated from the U.S. Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, was in charge of the RNA's psychological operations campaign against the Maoists. He was recently reassigned as Assistant Director of Military Intelligence. Chhetri has two successful brothers also in the military: Lt. Colonel Ratindra Khatri is aide-de-camp to King Gyanendra while Colonel Rajendra Chhetri is working at Nepal's Mission to the United Nations in New York.

GON WILL LIKELY RE-DECLARE THE MAOISTS AS TERRORISTS

4. (S) In a telephone conversation with the Ambassador, Major General Rookmangud Katawal, ranking military member of Nepal's National Security Council, reported that the GON Cabinet was deliberating over how to respond to the morning

incidents. He indicated that, with the King's support, the GON would likely re-declare the Maoists as a terrorist group, resurrect the now-suspended anti-terrorist act, and request Interpol blue-corner notices for Maoist leaders. (Note. The GON removed the terrorist label from the Maoists as a pre-condition for peace talks during the cease-fire. End Note.) Although the ministers had discussed the possibility of declaring a nation-wide state of emergency, it would likely not make that declaration at this time, he said. Katawal sought support from the international community for the government's efforts to combat the insurgency. The Ambassador counseled against the declaration of a state of emergency or imposition of martial law at this time.

15. (U) Post issued the following press statement in response to the Maoist attacks:

BEGIN TEXT:

The U.S. Embassy denounces the terrorist attacks by the Maoists against two Royal Nepal Army Colonels this morning. These attacks demonstrate the Maoists' rejection of the Nepalese people's overwhelming call for peace and the Maoists' continued willingness to resort to brutal crimes to achieve their objectives. The U.S. Embassy also condemns the Maoists' vicious attack on the Rastriya Banijya Bank in Dang District, resulting in the serious injury of a bank official. The U.S. Embassy extends its heartfelt sympathy to the family of Colonel Kirin Basnyat who died from the terrorist assault, as well as to the families of those injured. Terrorist acts like these are exactly what earned the Maoists a place on the U.S. Terrorist Watch List.

END TEXT.

COMMENT

16. (C) Colonel Basnyat is the highest ranking army officer the Maoists have killed during the seven-year insurgency. The killings came as no surprise to GON security forces as they had been anticipating for months that the Maoists would conduct targeted assassinations within the capital. The speed and accuracy with which the Maoists attacked suggests that the Maoist leadership did not precipitously break off the cease-fire, but rather indicates a well-planned and calmly-executed operation. Both officers had close ties with the United States. Post expects that the Maoists will conduct similar attacks in coming weeks. End Comment.
MALINOWSKI